The man who really came back!

IN the film industry, comebacks are a norm. Unfortunately, so is the fact that by and large, comebacks do not work. In musicbiz, even stalwarts like Hemant Kumar (*Do Ladke Dono Kadke, Love in Canada*), O.P. Nayyar (*Khoon Ka Badla Khoon, Nischaiy* and *Zid*) and Naushad (*Dharam Kanta, Tere Payal Mere Geet, Guddu*) failed to make waves, as did Chitragupta despite a massive hit in *Ghar Dwaar*. Khaiyaam (*Kabhie Kabhie, Noorie, Umrao Jaan, Bazaar*) and Ravi (*Nikaah*) did succeed to an extent, but both composers also gave turnips galore, Khaiyaam scoring duds like *Sawaal, Baawri* and *Dil Aakhir Dil Hai* and Ravi composing non-starters like *Dahleej, Awam, Mujhe Shakti Do* and others. Even C. Ramachandra came a cropper in *Rootha Na Karo*.

But the one man who 'came back' as creative as in his peak phase was that redoubtable Babu Moshai from Bengal - Salil Choudhury, a composer who was more Bengali than the many Bengali composers who adorned Hindi films. Two years have passed since this genius died in near-penury and anonymity in Calcutta, but Salil-*da*'s melodies live on.

To the old timer, Salil (So-Li'l Choudhury would be an apt name concluding his limited oeuvre!) needs no introduction. A versatile artiste who also had a strong foundation of both folk and international music, Salil hated claustrophobic parameters in music and rightly felt that even international influences enriched music. He scored with distinction for Bengali and Malayalam films as well, came out with a plethora of non-film albums and also composed for ballets. But to the Hindi film music buff, he is best known as the creator of the awesome music of Bimal Roy's *Madhumati* and also as the creator of the exquisite songs of films like *Maya* (*Koi sone ke dilwala*), *Parakh, Jagte Raho, Chhaya* and others. In the art of scoring background music, Salil-*da* had few equals and so he was a compulsion in songless films that succeeded (like *Kanoon* and *Ittefaq*) and even a few that failed (*Kanoon Kya Karega*).

What's more, Salil Choudhury was also brought in only to score the background music when the filmmaker felt that the demands of the subjects were beyond the scope of his song composer (*Kaala Patthar, Chehere Pe Chehera*).

After *Pinjre Ke Panchhi* (1966), Salil Choudhury's career reached an impasse due to a major legal case against him. Salil Choudhury returned to compose the brilliant background music of *Ittefaq*. But it was really with the enduring score of Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anand*, studded as it was with gems like *Kahin door jab din dhal jaaye* and *Maine tere liye hi saat rang ke sapne chune* (Mukesh), *Na jeeya laage na* (Lata) and *Zindagi kaisi hai paheli* (Manna Dey) that he returned. He seemed to hopelessly flounder in the sex-comedy fiasco *Sabse Bada Sukh*, but after that, left a mark even in an obscure film like *Minoo* (1977) for which he composed *Teri galiyon mein hum aaye* (Manna Dey-Antara Choudhury) and *Kaali re kaali re* (Antara - incidentally, Salil's daughter).

Salil Choudhury's sole liaison with Anand Bakshi - AVM's *Jeevan Jyoti* (1976) failed to make waves despite the lilt of Kishore's *Moujo ki doli* and Kishore-Lata's *Maine dil se* duet. Uninspired at the fag end of his career, with every factor ranged against him, Salil could also not rise to his level of innovative excellence.

But for someone who essentially worked in the '50s and '60s, the strength of Salil Choudhury lay in sounding as modern as anyone else in the '70s - and that without sacrificing his style and kowtowing to market compulsions. He spun magic in *Annadata* with typically complex Salil numbers like Lata's *Nis din nis din mere zulmi sajan*, Kishore-Sabita (his second wife)'s *O meri pran sajani* with its rambunctious beat, Mukesh's soulful *Nain hamare* and Kishore's *Guzar na jaaye din din din*.

The Salil Choudhury tune was nothing if not complex, changing track when least expected, as these beauties showed. Unconventional to a fault, he followed *Annadata* with another splendid score in Gulzar's *Mere Apne*, honed with Lata's awesome *Roz akeli aaye* (sadly deleted from the film), Kishore's *Koi hota jisko apna* and that caustic satire by Mukesh and Kishore, *Haal chaal theek thaak hai*. Though Gulzar and Salil tuned well, it was Yogesh who seemed to be more in synch with Salil's demands, and but for *Anokha Daan* (in which Gulzar and Yogesh shared the lyrical honors like in *Anand*), the maestro worked almost exclusively with Yogesh after his comeback. And the few films they did left an indelible impact, with stunners like *Rajnigandha phool tumhare* (*Rajnigandha*) and *Pyaas liye manwa* (*Mere Bhaiya*) (both ranking among Salil's finest gifts to Lata), *Kayi baar yoon hi dekha hai* (the song that won his favourite singer Mukesh a National aqward, also from Rajnigandha), *Jaaneman jaaneman*, the bubbly Asha duet that gifted Yesudas to national cinema and the remaining songs of *Chhoti Si Baat* — Lata's *Na jaane kyoon* and Mukesh's *Yeh din kya aaye*.

How many composers can boast of sticking completely to their own convictions, roots and style, totally avoiding compromise, and yet delivering great music that was also popular? Thanks to his broad vision and cosmopolitan attitude and his magnificent sense of orchestration and sound, Salil Choudhury succeeded where other highly individualistic composers like Jaidev and Khaiyaam failed. In every sense of the word, Salil-*da* was in a class of his own. ●

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